

Strategic Knowledge Maps in Action: Coalition to Reduce Drug Abuse

Bernadette Wright, PhD, Steven E. Wallis, PhD, and Ladel Lewis, PhD, July, 2015

Strategic Knowledge Mapping is a new way to assess and improve a map, or a set of interconnected ideas, such as a strategic plan, a program, or a law. We can also use Integrative Propositional Analysis (IPA) to link together related maps. For more information on the science behind these methods, see our white papers on Strategic Knowledge Mapping and Strategic Planning 3.0, available at www.meaningfulevidence.com/publications.

Unlike other “systems-based” methods or “big data” methods, Strategic Knowledge Mapping is an easier-to-use method. It does not require any special software or fancy statistics. It supports communication and collaboration. Also, it provides a way to assess and improve maps before implementing them.

In Scotland, the Scottish Parliament formed a group to better understand the drug and alcohol problem. **Figure 1**, below, shows a simplified version of the overall map that the group developed. This map integrates three smaller maps that view the drug problem through three different lenses: 1) interventions and recovery, 2) public health, and 3) community. Each circle in the map shows an idea, or concept, that is important to understanding and addressing the problem. Arrows show causal relationships, such as “increases,” “reduces,” or “determines.”

Figure 2 shows the Strategic Knowledge Map scores for each Map and the progress made by integrating Maps 1 through 3 to create the integrated map.

- **Greater breadth of understanding.** The new Integrated Map has the greatest breadth of the four maps (breadth = 6). The breadth is the number of concepts, or circles, in the Map. The greater your map’s breadth, the wider your field of view — the more pieces you see to the puzzle, or the “bigger picture” you can see.
- **Greater depth of understanding.** The integrated map also has the greatest depth of the four maps (depth = 0.33). The depth is the number of transformative concepts divided by the total number of concepts in the map. Transformative concepts are those with two or more arrows leading to them, indicated by gold stars. We understand concepts better when we understand how they are changed by two or more other concepts. This greater depth of understanding indicates that this map is more likely to be effective at addressing the problem.
- **Leverage Points.** Additionally, the integrated map shows “Leverage Points,” opportunities where small efforts might lead to larger results. For example, we can expect improvements in “treatment, social support, and health promotion” to lead to improvements in both “benefits socially and individually” and “illicit trade and misuse.”

This coalition has many admirable goals and a reasonable ability to obtain those goals – if they use the in-depth, integrated map. While the integrated

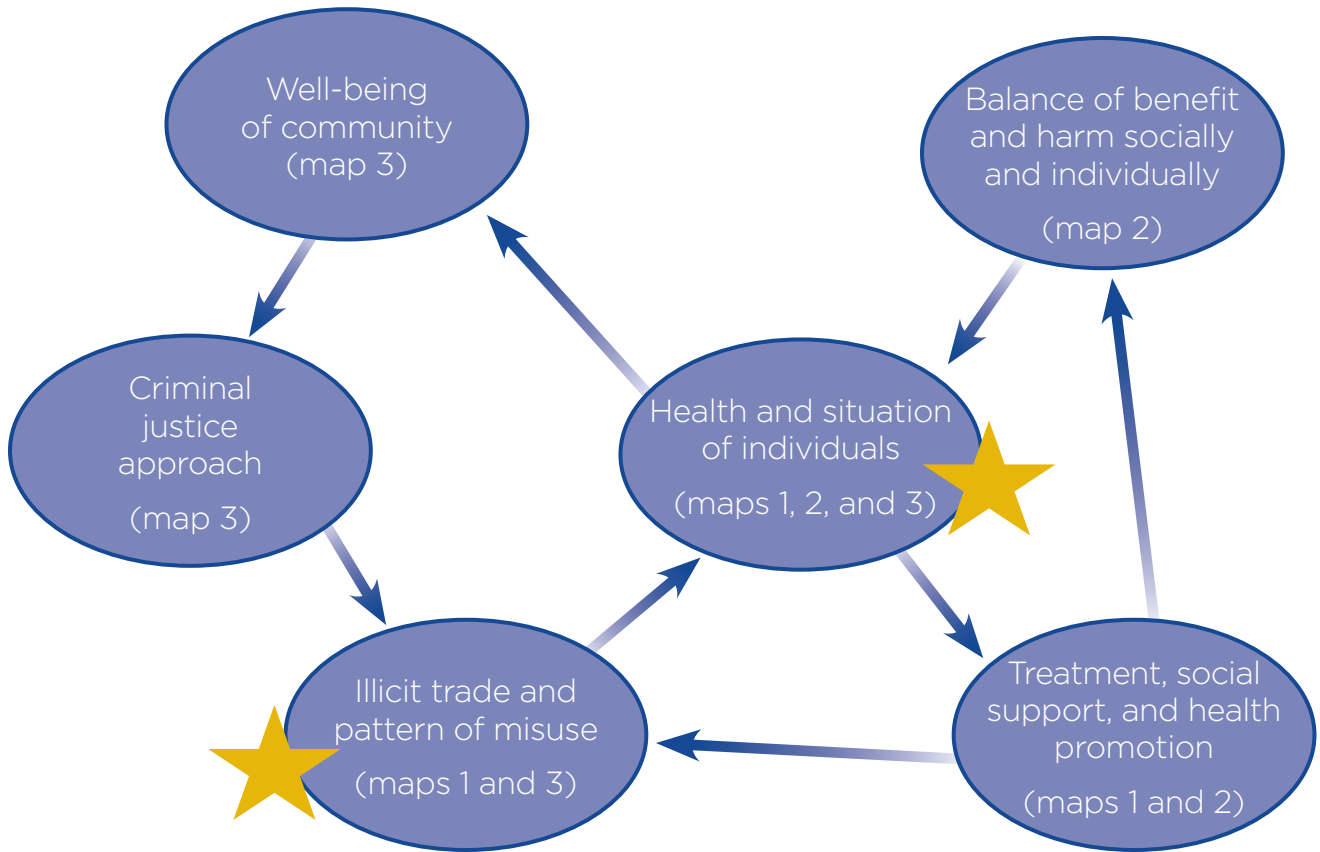


Figure 1: Integrated Map Combining Three Smaller Maps

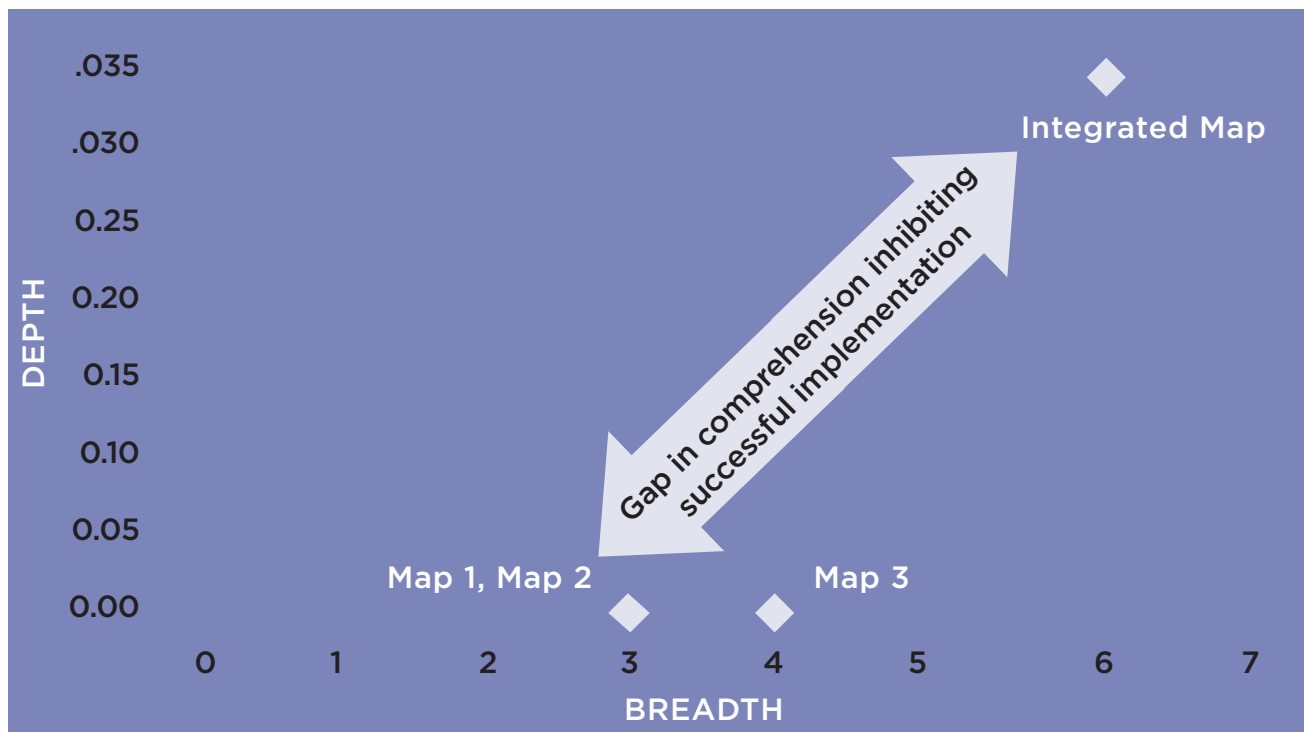


Figure 2: Strategic Knowledge Map Scores

map is a dramatic improvement over the individual maps, more work lies ahead to create a more effective Strategic Knowledge Map that the coalition and its members can use to effectively move the coalition forward. Meaningful Evidence's ASK MATT Coaches could support the coalition in these next steps.

- **Check the data.** To ensure a quality map, we need to make sure that the map is based on factual data. For example, what is the evidence that providing treatment and support reduces drug use and associated criminal activity?
- **Measure outcomes.** Another important step is to implement your map and track your results. For example, the coalition might measure the criminal justice approach by tracking the use of prisons and the use of addictions treatment centers for drug offenders.
- **Improve the map.** We could greatly improve the depth of understanding by identifying more concepts and more causal connections between the concepts. For example, in the map, the concept of “community well-being” is not well-explained. The same applies to every concept that is not transformative (does not have two

or more causal arrows leading to it). Coalition members might ask, what are some other things that can affect community well-being, and what do they mean for our activities?

- **Play the ASK MATT game.** Leaders and teams may choose to play the ASK MATT tabletop game, as a fun way to collaboratively improve their Strategic Knowledge Maps.

In the same way, we can help you put together the pieces of the puzzle to create a map that leads to your success.

Interested in exploring how Strategic Knowledge Mapping can benefit your organization? Contact Meaningful Evidence today.

Sources

Scotland's Futures Forum, *[Approaches to Alcohol and Drugs in Scotland: A Question of Architecture.](#)*

Wallis, Steven E. *[“Toward the Development of More Robust Policy Models.”](#)* *Integral Review*, March 2010, Vol. 6, No. 1.



Meaningful Evidence, LLC
1069 West Broad Street #141
Falls Church, VA 22046
703.348.0061 | info@meaningfulevidence.com



For information on how to become a Certified SKM Coach, please contact:

Meaningful Evidence, LLC
1656 Wynnnoochee Way
Petaluma, CA 94954
707.338.3133 | ASKMATT@meaningfulevidence.com